

Ad Number: GCI0397327-01

Advertiser:

Martin County Commissioners

Insertion Number: N/A

Agency:

N/A

Size:

2 Col x 10 in

Section-Page-Zone(s):

A-13-All

Color Type:

N/A

Description:

articles ad



Gil Smart
Columnist
Treasure Coast Newspapers
USA TODAY NETWORK – FLA.

I come to praise Martin County Superintendent of Schools Laurie Gaylord, not to bury her. But I will ding her just a little bit.

In a photo posted to the school district's Facebook page Wednesday, Gaylord is shown sitting maybe a foot behind an unnamed young student from SeaWind Elementary School. Gaylord wanted to see the district's new "distance learning" program through the eyes of a student.

That's a really worthy goal.

But as an astute reader who passed the image along to me noted — this ain't what you call "social distancing." Pretty much the opposite, really.

"I know the family," explained Gaylord when I spoke with her Wednesday afternoon. "A lot of questions were asked before I did this — is anyone in the house sick or been exposed" to the virus.

"I keep sanitation wipes in my purse, and we wiped down the counter and the keyboard," she said.

"I'm not sick," she said, and no more "home visits" are planned.

Good thing. Call it the best message.

But the reason for the visit was legitimate.

Gaylord said the weeks, as educators have geared up to kick off the online learning — necessitated by school closures due to the virus crisis — there were virtual meetings and memos and more. It was an astounding amount of work just setting it all up.

But at the end of the day — or rather, as the beginning of online classes — Gaylord needed to know: Would it actually work?

Could the youngest students, the least tech-savvy, navigate the various links and apps? Was it absolutely clear to the kids what they needed to do and how they needed to do it?

In fact, said Gaylord, her experience looking over the student's shoulder told her the answer was "no."

As she watched the mother and child try to figure out how to submit a homework assignment, it made Gaylord realize teachers can't tell kids how to do something once and expect the kids to remember it all.

"It was critical for me to learn that teachers need to be reiterating these ground rules every day," Gaylord said.

As a parent of a fourth and seventh grader wading through all this distance learning, I'm grateful Gaylord is being this thorough.

But distance learning requires, uh, some actual physical distance.

The pic was posted the same day Gov. Ron DeSantis finally issued a stay-at-home order for the next month. That, on top of the local orders already issued (St. Lucie County) and soon to be issued (Port St. Lucie, Martin County) made the image of Gaylord sitting right behind the student seem

particularly tone-deaf.

Again, I don't want to disparage the motives. But when even some of the highest-ranking officials in a community forget to take stringent measures, or broadcast the wrong message, it shows you how far we have to go to internalize this "new normal."

It's happening to a lot of us. How many times have you been out picking up essentials when you realize: I just touched my face.

How many times have you joined a

queue, like at Publix during "senior shopping hours," and later think: Maybe I should have gotten out of there.

Things that once seemed routine, or even great idea in normal times — like the head of the school district actually going out to a student's home to try and better understand that student's educational experience — need to be put on hold indefinitely.

Gaylord said if she hadn't had the opportunity to observe the student close-up, she wouldn't have fully understood that student's experience with the new system. I get that. In the long run, the inability to do things like

this is going to be detrimental.

And in the long run, really, that picture of Gaylord and the student probably isn't a big deal. But don't you see? There's always a chance it could turn out to be a huge deal indeed.

That is our new normal.

And I'm here to tell you: It stinks.

Gil Smart is a TCPalm columnist and a member of the Editorial Board. His columns reflect his opinion; if you like what you read please consider subscribing to TCPalm. Gil can be reached at gil.smart@tcpalm.com, by phone at (772) 223-4741 or via Twitter at @TCPalmGilSmart.

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NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARINGS

Notice is hereby given that the Board of County Commissioners of Martin County will conduct a public hearing on April 21, 2020 to consider an ordinance related to the Martin County Land Development Regulations. The hearing will be conducted beginning at 9:00 AM., or as soon thereafter as the following item may be heard. The title of the proposed ordinance is:

AN ORDINANCE OF MARTIN COUNTY, FLORIDA, AMENDING ARTICLE 3, ZONING DISTRICTS, TABLE 3.12.1, LAND DEVELOPMENT REGULATIONS, MARTIN COUNTY; PROVIDING FOR APPLICABILITY, CONFLICTING PROVISIONS, SEVERABILITY, FILING WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, CODIFICATION, AND AN EFFECTIVE DATE.

All interested persons are invited to attend and be heard. The meeting will be held in the John F. Armstrong Wing of the Blake Library, 2351 SE Monterey Road, Stuart, Florida. Written comments may be sent to: Nicki van Vonno, Director, Martin County Growth Management Department, 2401 S.E. Monterey Road, Stuart, Florida 34996. Copies of the items will be available from the Growth Management Department. For more information, contact Nicki van Vonno, Director, Growth Management Department at (772) 288-5495.

Persons with disabilities who need an accommodation in order to participate in this proceeding are entitled, at no cost, to the provision of certain assistance. This does not include transportation to and from the meeting. Please contact the Office of the ADA Coordinator at (772) 320-3131 or the Office of the County Administrator at (772) 288-5400, or in writing to 2401 S.E. Monterey Road, Stuart, FL, 34996, no later than three days before the hearing date. Persons using a TTY device, please call 711 Florida Relay Services.

If any person decides to appeal any decision made with respect to any matter considered at the meetings or hearings of any board, committee, agency, council, or advisory group, that person will need a record of the proceedings and, for such purpose, may need to ensure that a verbatim record of the proceedings is made, which record should include the testimony and evidence upon which the appeal is to be based.

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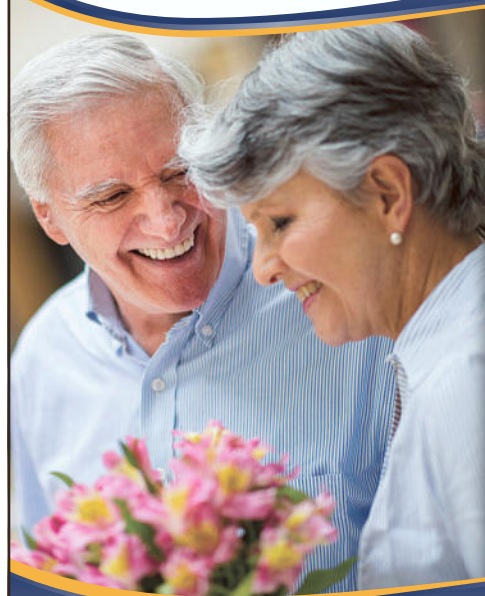
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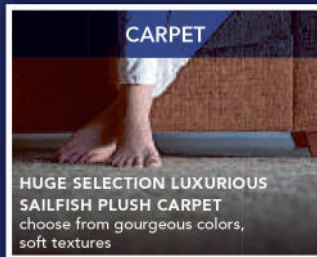
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